

Revolutionary Theatricality: Dramatized American Protest, 1967-1968

Angela Rothman
University of Oregon

American protest against the political and social establishment grew between the years 1967 and 1968 because dramatic aspects of rebellion manifested in theatrical methods. Prominent examples of these protests include the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the production of *Paradise Now* by the Living Theatre, the Broadway cast production of the musical *Hair*, and the Festival of Life by the Yippie Movement¹ at the Chicago Democratic National Convention. During this intense period of domestic conflict, these activists embraced the revolutions of radical theater as visible forms of protest.

Theatrical performance is a major presentation performed by actors and interpreted by audiences, both politically and socially. In an America embroiled in war and cultural conflict, the actors in social groups used revolutionary strategies to express the need for changes in society. Naomi Feigelson's *The Underground Revolution: Hippies, Yippies, and Others* argues that politics meshed with theater in "the insistence on involvement, the need for each person to feel part of life."² Doing so made "the spectator part of the action, [in] a drive for liberation and personal expression."³ Both Broadway and off-Broadway theater companies, as well as activists like the Yippies, created a platform for their messages and invited spectators to join the drama. While political theater was not a new art form, experimental theater methods decisively influenced performative protests in the late 1960s. They demonstrated their theatrical protest in the call to, and act of, revolution. Stephan Mark Halpern writes that as "the war in Vietnam dragged on and on it seemed to expose the unresponsiveness of government and the weaknesses in American society;" this instability coupled with social repression made a volatile mixture.⁴

¹ Yippies were members of the Youth International Party and were one of the groups who protested at the 1968 Democratic National Convention.

² Naomi Feigelson, *The Underground Revolution; Hippies, Yippies, and Others*. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1970), 175.

³ Ibid., 175.

⁴ Stephen Mark Halpern, *Looking Back: Modern America in Historical Perspective*. (Rand McNally History Series. Chicago: Rand McNally College Publications, 1975), 50.

All four prior examples of protest are political theater because they attempt to educate others in a new way of thinking and acting. Halpern's analysis and that of many writers indicate American's low degree of political and social engagement during the late 1960s.

Theater as art also indicates societal changes: a plethora of groups felt the need to protest because they felt deprived of political power. Jonathan Swift's 1971 article "don't Put It Down!" suggests that the 1960s was an era of "anxiety...confusion, lack of direction, [and] dissatisfaction" over "the entrenched beliefs and customs of a society that was speedily becoming apathetic."⁵ Though he refers to the message of the musical *Hair*, this evaluation is applicable to the theatrical protests of the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Living Theatre, and the Yippies because they also performed their protests against the backdrop of an unresponsive establishment. The San Francisco Mime Troupe used 'guerrilla theatre' to revolt against theatrical, societal, and political establishments. The Living Theatre sought the "Beautiful Non-Violent Anarchist Revolution" acted out in *Paradise Now* to permeate a complacent, capitalist society.⁶ The actors in the Broadway cast of *Hair* acted out in defiance of conventional theater norms, represented by the traditional Broadway establishment. During the Chicago Democratic National Convention, the Yippie movement acted on its distrust of authority by using theatrical resistance in the streets and parks of Chicago. In short, theater in the late 1960s used group participation as a theatrical and popular form of socio-political collective action.

In this context, specific theatrical revolutionary tactics are methods of the staging and the breaking of the "fourth wall." Typically, radical theaters reliably broke the "fourth wall," or "the

⁵ Jonathan Swift, 1971. "'don't Put It Down!' A Teacher's Session with HAIR." (*The English Journal* 60 (5). National Council of Teachers of English), 627–628.

⁶ Malina, Judith, Beck, Julian, and Paul Avrich Collection, *Paradise Now; Collective Creation of the Living Theatre*, (New York: Random House, 1971), 5.

proscenium opening through which the audience sees the performance.”⁷ Actors blurred the line between performer and audience. They directly engaged with the audience through actions and spoken text, as well as invited the audience to take a role in the production.⁸ Generally, radical theater companies staged their protest plays in non-traditional theaters. For example, the San Francisco Mime Troupe performed in public space, occupying streets and parks in defiance of civil permits.⁹ While the Living Theatre required some form of building to serve as a theater, the collective avoided curtains, artificial lighting, and arranged seating - the trappings of conventional theater - and encouraged movement to the streets in revolution. The Broadway production of *Hair* was one of the few plays with radical goals that required a basic theater platform, but because it required a “*bare stage*, totally exposed, [with] no wing masking” and no curtains, it attempted to ignore the theater as a restrictive space.¹⁰ Like the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Yippies operated their radical theatrics in public space against city ordinances. On a broader scale, the Yippies broke the fourth wall as nontraditional protest: as part of their Festival to protest the Convention, the Yippies physically interacted with their audience of spectators. They created celebrations in the parks of Chicago that necessitated the participation of their onlookers. These two methods of theatrical revolution, unconventional staging and breaking the “fourth wall,” guided the work of the radical theater movement and the Yippies.

What were these groups protesting and why? In her dissertation “The San Francisco Mime Troupe as Radical Theater,” Mary Elizabeth Booth Edelson concludes that “for art and activism to coincide, two conditions seem obligatory: first, a brewing political and/or social

⁷ “fourth, adj. special uses, S1. Fourth wall.” OED Online. December 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/viewdictionaryentry/Entry/11125> (accessed February 15, 2016).

⁸ Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1972), 169-173.

⁹ C. W. E. Bigsby, *A Critical Introduction to Twentieth-century American Drama*. (Cambridge [Cambridgeshire]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 335.

¹⁰ Galt MacDermot., Gerome Ragni, and James Rado. *Hair; the American Tribal Love-rock Musical*. (New York: Pocket Books, 1969), v.

crisis; and second, a theater which sees its art as taking sides in that crisis.”¹¹ Though there were numerous conflicts taking place during the tumultuous 1960s, some of the most visible were American protests against the Vietnam War. Political theater became a visible, symbolic, and participatory form of collective action protest against the brutality of the war and the American society that created it. While various groups within the anti-war movement called for reform and change in the political arena, when the federal government disregarded their messages, they resorted to other methods of demonstration. Theater, particularly experimental productions, was a form of protest against conformity and repression.

The anarchist San Francisco Mime Troupe set the revolutionary stage of radical theater through its satiric portrayal of society. Because the group performed to restore the link between the actor and social challenges of the time, “the Mime Troupe’s theater became an attack on bourgeois theater and what it stood for politically and aesthetically.”¹² Their leader, R.G. Davis, established his troupe to challenge to conventional theater productions and the complacent middle-class American lifestyle. Borrowing from multiple theater styles, including French mime and black minstrelsy, the group in the early 1960s “practiced escaping from the bourgeois doldrums...toward an alternative culture.”¹³ The earliest visible method of that escape occurred in the early 1960s when the Mime Troupe gravitated towards *commedia dell’arte*; this form of classical Italian theater uses established characters and storylines to create biting social critiques. The Mime Troupe relied on pre-written *commedia* plotlines infused with music, interruptive actions, and other improvisations to re-interpret a satirical message for modern audiences. Davis

¹¹ Mary Elizabeth Booth Edelson, "The San Francisco Mime Troupe as Radical Theater." (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1975), 135.

¹² Edelson, "The San Francisco Mime Troupe as Radical Theater," 43.

¹³ R. G. Davis, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years*, (1st ed. Palo Alto, Calif.: Ramparts Press, 1975), 28.

and the Troupe developed their fluid radical-pacifist ideology to include a “tension of the political intensity [they] were beginning to require of [their] shows.”¹⁴ *Commedia* supplied a method for the group to mock society in order to provoke social change: for example, in their 1967 production *L’Amant Militaire* they criticized the Vietnam War in a mocking form using puppets and masks. Though the play was reinterpreted for a 1960s context from the original French version, under the Troupe’s direction it became guerrilla theater and represented the oppression of Vietnamese people by American soldiers. *Commedia dell’arte* allowed the Troupe to be satirists of both politics and society.

As the representative voice of the group until 1970, R.G. Davis’s tenure gave the Mime Troupe a leader who articulated revolution. He directed the Troupe in guerrilla theater productions. These off off-Broadway performances operated underneath society with the intent to challenge, dare, and upset the ruling order.¹⁵ Echoing the Cuban revolutionary Che Guevara, Davis explains how the connection between theater and guerrilla warfare creates revolution in his 1967 article “Guerrilla Theatre.” He sees that stagnation occurs because “‘the system’ is debilitating, repressive, and non-aesthetic.”¹⁶ To Davis, guerrilla theater is one method to change that system. In the article, he proposes a handbook to ensure the guerrilla theater’s success, as “theatre IS a social entity” that can either develop the regulations of society, “or it

¹⁴ Ibid., 82.

¹⁵ Off off-Broadway and the conventional, commercial world of Broadway theaters were the polar ends of the theater spectrum, and off-Broadway served as a middle ground between them. In her article “Broadway: A Theatre Historian’s Perspective,” Brooks McNamara defines off-Broadway as theater that “[provided] much of the fare – especially the avantgarde and the classics - that could not often be seen on Broadway” (125). Michael Smith’s article “The Good Scene: Off Off-Broadway” gives an engaging discussion of the history of off off-Broadway, which developed out of off-Broadway plays. Epitomized by the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Living Theatre, off off-Broadway is work without pay for actors and “theatre without theatres” (159). They see that “the procedures of the professional theatre are inadequate” and “integrity and the freedom to explore, experiment, and grow count more than respectable or impressive surroundings,” which usually meant little commercialization and funding (159-160).

¹⁶ R. G. Davis, “Guerrilla Theatre”. *The Tulane Drama Review* 10 (4), (The MIT Press: 130–36. 1966), 131.

can look to changing that society...and that's *political*.”¹⁷ He perceives both traditional theater and contemporary politics as impotent and in need of radicalization to create change. Guerrilla theater would develop anarchist social attitudes and would also ideally transform the political structure. Davis' largest contribution to the radical theater movement was his creation of guerrilla theater, which would influence the founding of other radical theater groups and productions.

The San Francisco Mime Troupe performed its theatrical revolutions in protest, and used unconventional methods – primarily, artistic commitment to character and unique performance venues - to accomplish it. In *Levitating the Pentagon*, J.W. Fenn argues that as an artistic response to the Vietnam War, the Troupe “generally pursued a more combative and confrontational expression of discontent... [in] the open air.”¹⁸ A Mime Troupe *commedia* actor juggled performing the character in the play through the use of masks and costumes, while also inserting his own individuality and political beliefs through improvisational acting techniques – the latter often occurred through audience interruptions and participation. The Mime Troupe had room to make political statements, such as a desire to end the Vietnam War, by using existing plays and the protection of masks and costumes. Fenn also examines guerrilla theater and Davis's language of war through the Mime Troupe's propensity for “taking its message to the people by performing works in the parks and on the boulevards of San Francisco.”¹⁹ Normal theater venues required both a consistent funding stream from paying patrons and donors, as well as compliance with government requirements to occupy buildings. The Troupe could not receive such funding without possessing a traditional theater, which was contradictory to their message.

¹⁷ Ibid., 131.

¹⁸ Jeffery W. Fenn, *Levitating the Pentagon: Evolutions in the American Theatre of the Vietnam War Era*, (Newark: London: University of Delaware Press; Associated University Presses, 1992), 50.

¹⁹ Ibid., 51.

The radical performance venues of outdoor theater also appealed to the group's artistic values as guerrilla fighters and reinforced their rebellion against the 'system;' the police could challenge the Mime Troupe in parks and streets, and they could respond with guerrilla warfare tactics. These approaches communicated the Troupe's general theme of rebellion against the establishment and its conformity.

Most significantly, the San Francisco Mime Troupe represented the satirical form of radical revolutionary theater and influenced other groups to cultivate performative protest. Interestingly, Davis saw "Radical Independent Theatre" as split into factions, of which the Left wing, led by his group, "has at its base a mimetic sense of imagery rather than a naturalistic imitation of reality."²⁰ In response to the standardization of theater as something that did not reflect society, the Mime Troupe attempted to create a new version of social values. The group acted as the satirical counterpart to principled experimentalism, influencing later groups. Claudia Orenstein argues in *Festive Revolutions* that the Troupe's popular comedic practices "[offered] theatrical strategies for confronting social and political oppression in a way that empowers performers and their audiences."²¹ The group's clowns, puppets, and masks utilized theater intended to make people laugh, yet the voices and actions of the actors made relevant satire of the era's troubled circumstances. By performing outdoors, the Mime Troupe's actors acted out their agitation against a socio-politically unconcerned public. Their audience interaction in this arena allowed both the audience and other radical theater companies to question the status quo.

The Living Theatre, an off off-Broadway theater company based in New York, further developed radical revolutionary theater by performing extreme versions of protest against

²⁰ Davis, *The First Ten Years*, 130.

²¹ Claudia Orenstein, *Festive Revolutions: The Politics of Popular Theater and the San Francisco Mime Troupe*. Performance Studies (Jackson, Miss.). (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 3.

repression. By the late 1960s, the Living Theatre “[mobilized] theatrical art to critique the everyday repressions of the dominant society, assume freedom, transform social relations, and enact an alternative utopian society.”²² Similar to the radical theater movement as a whole, the collective’s communal living arrangements and provocative anarchist beliefs criticized traditional authorities of both theater and society. They acted to free the theater. For the Living Theatre, anarchism did not have connotations of lawless and confused actions, but was instead a form of deliberately independent social living without politics. Julian Beck and Judith Malina, the company’s founders, immersed themselves in the cooperative methods that the company espoused. The name of the company represented its radical intentions towards American institutions and beliefs, and its performances enacted that purpose.

Though it created change through experimental methods, the Living Theatre’s socio-political causes and abrupt production material place them in the spectrum of 1960s radical revolutionary theater. Like the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the Living Theatre believed in an alternative society and considered “cultural life, represented by ‘the theatre,’ and political, public life, by ‘the street,’ [to be] intertwined inexplicably.”²³ R.G. Davis himself regarded the Living Theatre and the Mime Troupe as opposite sides of the same coin. The Right wing of Radical Independent Theatre, spearheaded by the Living Theatre, “[despairs] more at the social setting around it...is an extension...from the bourgeois theatre, and is closely aligned with the aesthetic avant garde.”²⁴ Though Davis hesitates to designate the latter as guerrilla theater in the same way that his Mime Troupe performed it, the Living Theatre nonetheless embraced the term in

²² Bradford D. Martin, *The Theater Is in the Street: Politics and Performance in Sixties America*, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004), 63.

²³ Ibid., 49.

²⁴ Davis, *The First Ten Years*, 130.

their aggressive theater techniques and opinions. Their shock-inducing plays used guerrilla theater tactics by refusing to conform to theatrical expectations.

The dissidence in both the method and delivery of Living Theatre productions was a revolutionary response to its perception of American society. Their dissonant plays borrowed from the theories and practices of Antonin Artaud, one of the first theatrical revolutionaries. In particular, Bradford D. Martin observes that Artaud's forms of realistic theater, without "artifice, 'talking heads,' and intellectualism," required a participatory theatricality "in which the actors' physicality and emotion affected the audience on a visceral level."²⁵ The collective's productions would emphasize that technique while also advocating for an anarchistic version of society. The government restricted the group's actions by enforcing tax and building code violations, but the Living Theatre symbolized these attacks as emblematic of its cause. The collective's severely zealous performances represented their socio-political cause because by performing in extremes, they hoped to agitate their audiences into changing a restrictive system.

In 1968, Living Theatre founders Julian Beck and Judith Malina worked with the collective to craft the radical play *Paradise Now*, which was to serve as the roadmap towards achieving revolution. *Paradise Now* uses non-violent, theatrical guerrilla warfare tactics to initiate the revolution among the audience. Firstly, the opening 'Rite of Guerilla Theatre' addresses individual spectators with perturbing lines, such as "I don't know how to stop the wars," "You can't live if you don't have money," and "I'm not allowed to take my clothes off" to suggest the contradiction between societal and individual values.²⁶ Though the actors performed in combative ways by shouting at and physically touching the audience, they were representing

²⁵ Martin, *The Theater Is In the Street*, 62.

²⁶ Judith Malina, Beck, Julian, Paul Avrich Collection, the Living Theatre, *Paradise Now; Collective Creation of the Living Theatre*, (New York: Random House, 1971), 16-17.

societal violence, not endorsing it; indeed, they desired a peaceful revolution. The Living Theatre used guerrilla theater metaphorically because these questions for the audience intentionally provoked reactions. Similar to how guerrilla warfare tactics engage the oppressive establishment indirectly, the actors of *Paradise Now* wanted the audience to critique the government and society. This form of guerrilla theater also occurred in the setting for the play: while the collective performed in semi-normal theater venues, where people still paid to watch the performance, *Paradise Now* dispensed with traditional theater settings such as chairs and curtains in order to perform. An edited film recording of *Paradise Now* demonstrates how the performers ignored the rigidity of seating arrangements throughout the entire play.²⁷ The theatrical roadmap to revolution, as communicated through *Paradise Now*, emphasized the need for comprehensive societal change in its staging methods.

Paradise Now also broke the fourth wall of traditional theater through direct contact with the audience as individuals, further revolutionizing the spectators. The first way the group did so is by inviting the audience to shed their clothes along with the actors; ‘The Rite of Universal Intercourse’ notes that “if a member of the public joins this group” of actors in “a pile, caressing, moving, undulating, loving,” then “he is welcomed into the Rite.”²⁸ One specific revolution the play demanded was a re-evaluation of sexuality in society, exemplified by the intertwined actors and audience. The other way *Paradise Now* broke the fourth wall was by creating times of discussion, where “the theatre becomes a forum, a political meeting, the crossroads of impassioned exchanges” for the audience and the actors.²⁹ The space that *Paradise Now* provided was its own revolution in theater as a rare form of theatrical public engagement. These

²⁷ *Paradise Now a Collective Creation of the Living Theatre*. DVD. United States: United States: Universal Mutant, 2008.

²⁸ Malina, et al. *Paradise Now*, 74.

²⁹ Pierre Biner, *The Living Theatre*, (New York: Horizon Press, 1972), 175.

group explorations also served as the basis for the group's demand for revolution outside of the theater walls; at the conclusion of *Paradise Now*, the audience was called to enact the revolution based on what they learned. Pierre Biner observes that "the Living Theatre actor merely plays himself on stage," which is the most expressive form of how they broke the fourth wall - there was a very limited one with which to begin.³⁰ As such, it is also important to note that the group performed *Paradise Now* for one year before writing a formal script for it, and the play accordingly changed with each performance.³¹ This lack of performance structure exemplifies the strength of the Living Theatre collective's talent, improvisational skills, and communication. Hence, the Living Theatre broke the fourth wall in various ways to give explicit instruction to the audience in disruptive revolution.

Finally, *Paradise Now* during the 1967-68 tour symbolized the collective's goals - to create a peaceful revolution through non-violence. Through ritual actions, guerrilla theater, and breaking the fourth wall, the actors hoped to guide everyone on the journey to Paradise. The play expresses the radical ambitions of 'The Beautiful Non-Violent Anarchist Revolution' in the actors' free theater speeches. They command the audience to "free theatre. The theatre is yours"³² because "the theatre is in the street. The street belongs to the people. Free the theatre. Free the street. Begin."³³ The Living Theatre actors ordered the audience to leave the theater with them to incite the revolution of *Paradise Now*. Because the collective combined non-violent guerrilla theater with direct audience engagement, the audience and the actors possessed the opportunity to create the revolution after the performance ended. Overall, the play intended to instigate the revolution through its theatricality. The audience and actors were to leave the theatre together,

³⁰ Ibid., 170.

³¹ Malina et al., *Paradise Now*, introduction.

³² Ibid., 23.

³³ Ibid., 140.

energized to begin the revolution in society.

Another part of the radical theater movement, the Broadway musical *Hair* was revolutionary in 1968 because it was experimental for and in direct contrast to Broadway musicals. Brooks McNamara observes that Broadway is a commercialized theater enterprise that “is designed to be profitable” because it “is seen by professionals as a business like any other” that “[intends] to entertain.”³⁴ These circumstances meant that Broadway produced conventional musicals and plays that did not offend paying customers; however, the musical *Hair* offended its customers as much as it entertained them. Though conventional in comparison to the off off-Broadway theater companies of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Living Theatre, *Hair* nevertheless symbolized theatrical revolution against the rigidity of Broadway through its anti-war subject matter, music and lyrics styles, costuming, and experimental staging. The musical’s off-Broadway inception and history were a combination of the work of its varied original creators: writers Gerome Ragni and James Rado, director Gerald Freedman, and producer Joseph Papp. Their collaborations on and intense disagreements over *Hair* spurred the musical’s development by Ragni and Rado into the hippie-centered production that arrived at Broadway’s Biltmore Theater in April 1968. According to Scott Miller, after extensive re-writing and development, “*Hair* [became] the revolution” that “rejected every convention of Broadway...and of the American musical in particular.”³⁵ It based its themes on the hippie counterculture that was visually represented by long hair, giving the musical its title. Hippie musical, sexual, and political values drove the plot about a young man, Claude, who is conflicted over whether to burn his draft card. Claude can either conform by joining the army and dying in the Vietnam

³⁴ Brooks McNamara, 2001. “Broadway: A Theatre Historian's Perspective.” (*TDR* (1988-) 45 (4). The MIT Press), 126-127.

³⁵ Scott Miller, *Let the Sun Shine In: The Genius of Hair*. (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003), 8.

War, or he can rebel against the system and continue living with the hippie tribal commune, the latter of which is attempting to create a new, free society parallel to the current one. Essentially, *Hair* grew by representing the revolution of the radical hippie counterculture against establishment Broadway norms in the traditional method of the musical.

In particular, *Hair* protested the traditional American musical by using popular music and breaking the fourth wall to communicate its anti-war message. Traditional musicals of the decade, such as *Man of La Mancha* and *Fiddler on the Roof* employed musical theater essentials, such as a clear narrative with a central character and musical pieces which use customary progressions. In contrast, *Hair* is an ensemble musical because though a main character exists - Claude - the other members of *Hair*'s hippie 'Tribe' develop the story directly. More generally, the Tribe rebels against repression and the values of past generations. This rebellion is most evident in the Original Broadway Cast recording, where the popular rock-and-roll music of the era drives the enthusiastic attitude of the actors. The title song, "Hair," glorifies the Tribe's "shining gleaming streaming flaxen waxen" hair, and the musical notes of "Hair" also mock the American national anthem.³⁶ This satire defied American involvement in the Vietnam War, in which the American military would not have allowed men to wear long hair. On a related note, the song "My Conviction" breaks the theatrical fourth wall because the mother character addresses *Hair*'s audience. She "[wishes] every mother and father in this theater/ Would go home tonight and make a speech to their teenagers/ And say kids...Be whoever you are, do whatever you want to do."³⁷ The breaking of the fourth wall was an innovative action for musicals because it implies that the actors recognize that they are performing on a stage. In the

³⁶ Galt MacDermot, Ragni, Gerome, and Rado, James. *Hair; the American Tribal Love-rock Musical*, (New York: Pocket Books, 1969), 65.

³⁷ Galt MacDermot, Ragni, Gerome, and Rado, James, *Hair Original Broadway Cast Recording*, "My Conviction," (New York, NY: RCA Victor, CD, 1988).

mother character tolerating the Tribe's long hair, she is sanctioning their self-expression in defiance of the establishment; it is also revealed that 'she' is a cross-dressing male actor, further demonstrating the rebellious and experimental musical theater revolution. In summary, *Hair*'s rock music and breaking of the fourth wall were avant-garde theatrics for the American musical.

Equally important, the experimental costuming and staging of *Hair* acted in opposition to standard musical performance. The show raised extraordinary controversy for its nude scene at the end of the first act. During Claude's existential questioning in the song "Where Do I Go?," the Tribe removes their clothes in a "moment of support and communalism...free of sexuality" in defiance of traditional societal norms.³⁸ The "Be-In" prior to the nude scene provided symbolism of love and community as the Tribe gathered to burn their draft cards together. While some scripts of *Hair* did not provide stage directions for the nakedness, Barbara Horn and Irving Buchen indicate that other scripts do provide for it. All scripts of the musical also give instructions to break the fourth wall in an intrusive manner at the end of the first act: policemen arrive to take the audience into custody for viewing obscene content.³⁹ Horn also discusses how "*Hair* was the first show on Broadway to display totally naked actors," and that influential critics, such as Martin Gottfried, detested the display.⁴⁰ Interestingly, she observes that audience members sometimes participated in the nudity, giving *Hair* a connection to the off-off Broadway world of the Living Theatre and *Paradise Now*.⁴¹ The nude scene represented the Tribe's independence from Broadway conventions. It proclaimed peace and independence against repression, borrowed from the real-life hippie communes of the 1960s.

³⁸ Miller, *Let the Sun Shine In*, 118.

³⁹ Barbara Lee Horn, *The Age of Hair / Evolution and Impact of Broadway's First Rock Musical*, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991), 74.

Irving H. Buchen, "Is the Future Hair?" *Salmagundi*, no. 12. (Skidmore College: 90-97. 1970), 92

⁴⁰ Horn, *The Age of Hair*, 87.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

In other ways, the staging of *Hair* dissented from Broadway standards because it utilized the audience in its message of freedom. Clive Barnes reviewed the Broadway production in 1968 and revels in how *Hair* resonates with revolutionary choices, where “half-naked hippies statuesquely [slow-paraded] down the center aisle” after interacting with the audience and giving them flowers.⁴² Jonathan Swift’s 1971 article remarks that “this is the first time a musical of world magnitude has been presented using the audience,” because *Hair* “opens with the actors coming from the audience...and it ends with the audience joining the actors on the stage” for an encore of “Hair.”⁴³ Horn recognizes this shift as combining the positions of viewer and performer in a triumphant act.⁴⁴ These staging choices included the audience in a theatrical event that defied Broadway norms. Participating in the theatrical events in these ways gave the audience the opportunity to be involved in a musical unlike any other. Essentially, *Hair*’s costumes and staging changed the image of the staid Broadway musical into a dynamic and incendiary protest against societal constraints.

Given these points, unlike the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Living Theatre, *Hair* does not call for a specific revolution, but creates a symbolic one to change Broadway in its radical theatricality of Broadway musicals. While Buchen believes that *Hair*’s understanding of evil and good suggests “a radical future,” the musical proclaims the benefits of a peaceful and figurative revolution through its theatrical devices.⁴⁵ More importantly, that form of revolution benefits from commercialization - because it is less radical than militant revolutions, it is subsidized by the public paying to view it. *Hair* was less of a threat than the guerrilla theater of

⁴² Clive Barnes, Theater: ‘Hair’ – It’s Fresh and Frank.” *New York Times* (ProQuest Historical Newspapers). New York City, NY. Apr 30, 1968.

⁴³ Swift, “‘don’t Put It Down!,’” 627.

⁴⁴ Horn, *The Age of Hair*, 80.

⁴⁵ Buchen, “Is the Future Hair?” 96.

the San Francisco Mime Troupe or the anarchic future society of the Living Theatre because the musical's cast and crew worked within the Broadway system and subjugated themselves to transform the establishment. Overall, the theatricality of *Hair* expressed that commercialized revolutionary tension to Broadway theater audiences.

As contemporaries of the radical theater movement, the Yippies used demonstration theatricality before and during the August 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago to protest the restrictive American government and society. The Yippie movement bolstered its image through street theater because it borrowed from the protest tactics of radical theater companies, primarily assessed by David Farber in *Chicago '68*. Prior to the convention, the buildup to the Yippies' plans amounted to staging for a theater production - they disseminated advertisements, made speeches for public awareness, and generally built the myth of Yippie. Orchestrated by Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin, the movement of YIPPIE - standing for both the Youth International Party and an exclamation of glee - necessitated both a social and mental revolution to create change.⁴⁶ According to the Walker Report, which was an assessment of the violent results of the Chicago Convention, the idea of theatricality "was a primary ingredient of [the Yippies'] approach. The audience would be the American public, the means of communication would be the mass media...the stage would be the streets and the message would be a demonstration of disrespect, irreverence and ridicule" of the establishment.⁴⁷ Disdaining a standard theater to make speeches, Yippies channeled off off-Broadway by theatricality in the streets. Yippies believed they were igniting a revolution towards the goal of a free society. Their extravagant and exorbitant imaginations relied on a uniquely theatrical public persona where

⁴⁶ Jerry Rubin, *Do It; Scenarios of the Revolution*. (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1970), 34.

⁴⁷ Daniel Walker and United States, *National Commission on the Causes Prevention of Violence. Rights in Conflict; the Violent Confrontation of Demonstrators and Police in the Parks and Streets of Chicago during the Week of the Democratic National Convention of 1968*. (Bantam Extra. New York: Bantam Books, 1968), 41-42.

individuals ‘did their own thing’ by behaving as they desired in the face of adversity. That individualism manifested in counterculture methods - such as using drugs or doing sexual activities in public - as well as in confrontational ways through public protests. Their behavior during this time period was unrivaled in its distinctive eccentricity. Yippies intended to “use the Democratic Party and the Chicago theater to build [their] stage” and thus make their theatrics fully visible to the American public.⁴⁸ Unlike the goals of the San Francisco Mime Troupe and the Living Theatre, the Yippies agitated merely to cause disturbance. Though the Yippies had few collective goals, they nevertheless intended to agitate the establishment; they accomplished that objective by working outside of the political system and articulated the perceived discontent in society. More generally, the Yippies clamored for attention in the months prior to the Chicago Democratic National Convention, where they would stage one of their largest theatrical productions of the decade.⁴⁹

The methodologies of Yippie leaders Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin created the foundations of YIPPIE activity at the convention, where their different approaches towards performative protest used revolutionary language. As they cultivated the YIPPIE myth, both men wanted to define the movement through a demonstration in Chicago. However, they also knew that the antagonistic establishment of Chicago’s mayor and police force would incite conflict. Abbie Hoffman made his reality a theater as a result of his experiences as a controversial activist in the counterculture and anti-war movements. In his post-Chicago biography *Revolution for the Hell of It*, he makes an analogy to the rising visibility of television: Hoffman wanted the “boring

⁴⁸ Rubin, *Do It*, 83.

⁴⁹ Though they were not an official group until late December 1967, Yippie theatrical protest also took place during the year and a half prior to Chicago 1968. Two primary examples are the August 24, 1967 throwing of dollar bills at the New York Stock Exchange and the October 21, 1967 endeavor to levitate the Pentagon during the March on the Pentagon.

drama” of the Chicago Convention to be eclipsed by the Yippies’ “*advertisement for revolution...being played out in the streets.*”⁵⁰ In defining the movement through the outrageous behavior of its members, rather than through any kind of ideology, Hoffman’s political farce set the stage for the circus-like “politics of absurdity” that the Yippies would bring to Chicago.⁵¹ In conjunction, social activist Jerry Rubin advanced “creative disruption” in “confrontational terms,” where “violence” was “the best means for the movement to grab public attention.”⁵² He relied on violent language and metaphors of guerrilla warfare in his promotional speeches for the Yippie movement; this method was another form of theatricality because he communicated his message in an adversarial way. Rubin believed that these kinds of strategies could change the minds of complacent Americans in the establishment. He justified extreme measures because “repression turns demonstration protests into wars.”⁵³ In effect, Hoffman and Rubin collaborated in theatrical work to advance their perception of the Yippie revolution. However, Rubin and Hoffman did not always see eye to eye, and the latter’s revolutionary ideas were closer to the disorganized countercultural and confrontational tactics the Yippies used on the ground.

Outside of the Chicago Democratic National Convention, the Yippies worked from August 18-August 30th 1968 to use theatrical demonstration in the streets of the city. In their dramatic “Daring Expose - Top Secret Yippie Plans for Lincoln Park,” the group published their intentions for the weeklong convention.⁵⁴ The Yippies believed that the nomination of Hubert Humphrey would continue the Vietnam War and thus determine the future of the war and

⁵⁰ Abbie Hoffman, *Revolution for the Hell of It*. (New York: Dial Press, 1968), 134.

⁵¹ Walker and United States, *Rights in Conflict*, 44.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 125.

⁵³ David R. Farber, *Chicago '68*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 20.

⁵⁴ Walker and United States, *Rights in Conflict*, 83-84.

America. As such, the Yippies concocted a “Celebration of Life...with workshops...demonstrations, rock concerts, pot, and plenty of gags” to counteract the Convention’s “Festival of Death.”⁵⁵ The creativity of their Festival of Life appeared most effectively in the selection of ‘Pigasus’ the pig on August 23, 1968 for the Democratic presidential candidacy. After they announced its nomination at the Chicago Civic Center, the pig was “‘arrested’ by police as he was being ‘interviewed’ by waiting journalists.”⁵⁶ The ‘Pigasus’ candidacy was Yippie satirical politics: after being arrested with the pig on various counts, Yippie leadership even debated the merits of eating the pig as a final act of civil disobedience against the political establishment. The significance of the pig’s name is twofold. Referencing the flying horse in Greek mythology, it firstly indicated that a Yippie-approved candidate would be nominated ‘when pigs fly.’ Secondly, the Yippies began referring to the adversarial Chicago police and administration as ‘pigs,’ further demoting the symbolic worth of ‘Pigasus’ in the eyes of the radical counterculture. By using public space to present their Democratic nominee, the Yippies lampooned the system because they believed change would never take place.

As a testament to the power of Yippie theatrical protest and other groups’ political demonstrations,⁵⁷ the Chicago political administration feared the dramatic revolution happening in its streets. Violent clashes throughout the convention among the police, the National Guard, and the protesters had elements of performance similar to the theater companies already discussed: their protest against the establishment used violence to make an anti-establishment message. In David Farber’s *Chicago ‘68*, he determines that “to the...police, all the

⁵⁵ Terry H. Anderson, *The Movement and the Sixties*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 219.

⁵⁶ Frank Kusch, *Battleground Chicago: The Police and the 1968 Democratic National Convention*. (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004), 60.

⁵⁷ The Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, one of the most influential peace platforms of the time, participated in the events of Chicago alongside the Yippies. They wanted to leverage the Democratic Party to end the war and communicate their dissent through non-violent, conventional marches and sit-ins.

demonstrators, short-haired and long-haired, were...un-American hippies” whose dramatic actions disrespected the “American political system that maintained stability and order.”⁵⁸ Furthermore, Marty Jezer argues that the Chicago “Mayor Richard Daley proved himself as adept a director of political theater as Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin” through his approval of “the police assaults on peaceful demonstrators.”⁵⁹ Daley “conveyed the message that... demonstrations would not be tolerated in Chicago during the Democratic convention.”⁶⁰ To reinforce that objective, he unleashed the force of Chicago police and the National Guard against the many peaceful and violent oppositions taking place that week in August of 1968. Jezer’s assessment is accurate, but only hints at Daley’s extensive background in this kind of heavy-handed repression during his tenure as mayor.⁶¹ He also does not determine the degree of Daley’s success - Daley failed in his mission to protect the city’s reputation because the brutality of his forces on national media caused dramatic reactions from the American public.⁶² The resilience of the protesters and the backlash from the nation to the city’s violence endangered his power as the leader of Chicago politics. Using his forces, Daley intended to “‘contain’ the enemy, preventing the American Vietcong [protesters] from disrupting his convention or

⁵⁸ Farber, *Chicago '68*, xiv.

To address the clashes between the Yippies and the police specifically, John Schultz’s *No One Was Killed: Documentation and Meditation: Convention Week, Chicago, August 1968*. Chicago: Big Table Pub., 1969.

⁵⁹ Jezer, *American Rebel*, 149.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 149.

⁶¹ For further analysis of Daley’s years as mayor of Chicago, see Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor’s *American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley: His Battle for Chicago and the Nation*. 1st ed. Boston: Little, Brown, 2000.

⁶² For media photos and analysis of a reporter and Chicago street “war correspondent,” see Mark Lane’s *Chicago Eyewitness*, (New York: Astor-Honor, 1968), 7.

To read vivid accounts of participants in the Chicago convention and its violence, see the collection by Donald Myrus and U.S. Attorney General Ramsey Clark, *Law & Disorder; the Chicago Convention and Its Aftermath*. Chicago: D. Myrus, 1968.

conducting guerrilla tactics in his Chicago.”⁶³ ⁶⁴ Altogether, the violence on the streets of Chicago had elements of theatricality because the Chicago leadership used excessive force.

Overall, the Yippies, the police, and Chicago administration used revolution-based theater to express their conflicting messages. Yippies knew that their tactics would be unlikely to change the results of the Chicago convention, and as such they represented Americans who were alienated from the political system. Police actions and the behavior of city leadership also indicate the alarming scale of conflict that developed in Chicago over the course of the weeklong convention. Radical theater reached its culmination in the turbulent struggle between the city and its demonstrators, and the Yippies would continue to use it in their future demonstrations for a changed America during the 1970s.

Viewing this history from a future vantage point, theater as demonstrative protest raised questions of performance. There are many ways to stage and perform civil disobedience, but generally, protest acts as theater to symbolically articulate group goals regardless of whether or not the protest is successful. The Skolnick Report *The Politics of Protest* states that

“participants in mass protest...see their grievances as rooted in the existing arrangements of power and authority in contemporary society, and they view their own activity as political action – on a direct or symbolic level – aimed at altering those arrangements.”⁶⁵ The performances of these groups, from the extreme to the mundane, were attempts to reach out to the American public in the hopes of change. Even though the San Francisco Mime Troupe, the

⁶³ Anderson, *Movement and the Sixties*, 217.

⁶⁴ David Farber also discusses in the introduction to his website for *Chicago '68*, www.chicago68.com, that many radicals nicknamed the city ‘Czechago’ in reference to the volatile situation in Prague, happening simultaneously to the Chicago Democratic National Convention. This comparison is significant because in Prague, Soviet troops attempted to violently subjugate reformers, while in Chicago, police and National Guardsmen abused the numerous protesters who demonstrated in the city’s streets.

⁶⁵ Jerome H. Skolnick and United States. Task Force on Demonstrations, Protests, Group Violence. *The Politics of Protest*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1969), 7.

Living Theatre, the Broadway production of *Hair*, and the Yippies were different forms of theater, they remained radical for their respective techniques.

Regardless of their differences, there is an extraordinary level of intertextuality in the works by and about their actions because these radical theater groups were contemporaries. Their similarities influenced each other, and in particular, the Yippies used theater to reflect their society's current turmoil. R.G. Davis remained aware of the activities of the Living Theatre throughout his tenure with the San Francisco Mime Troupe and discusses them in his biography, *The San Francisco Mime Troupe: The First Ten Years*.⁶⁶ *Hair* received little respect from the rest of the radical theater movement because of its commercialization.⁶⁷ Most importantly, the radical theaters of the Living Theatre and the San Francisco Mime Troupe decisively influenced the work of the Yippies at the Chicago Democratic Convention. Jerry Rubin appreciated the combative elements of radical revolutionary guerrilla theater, and it is important to note that Rubin recalls seeing a performance of *Paradise Now* prior to the Chicago Convention. He was impressed at how the Living Theatre "eliminated the stage and joined the audience" in "Revolutionary theater," and hoped to do so in the eventual national stage that Chicago presented.⁶⁸ During the weeklong Convention, Abbie Hoffman would use the language of guerrilla war to inspire protesters, claiming that their performative protest "was a second

⁶⁶ Davis, *The First Ten Years*, 130-136. Davis writes that despite their radical methods, the Living Theatre nevertheless practiced the bourgeoisie intellectual theater methodology against which the San Francisco Mime Troupe rebelled. He saw the Living Theatre's production of *Paradise Now* in Berkeley, CA, but the show disintegrated because the audience participated in the extreme – they removed their clothes and smoked marijuana in defiance of the actors' claims of repression, and the performance became redundant (Davis 133). Davis realized that the "San Francisco audience...was less cohesive and far less politically activist, thereby receptive to participatory experiences in the here and now" (Davis 134).

⁶⁷ James Martin Harding, and Rosenthal, Cindy. *Restaging the Sixties: Radical Theaters and Their Legacies*, (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 201. Harding partially analyzes *Hair*'s position in *Restaging the Sixties* as "the fashionable 'revolution' as represented by...*Hair*" (201). The musical "borrowed techniques from the sixties theatrical avant-garde" because "part of the legacy of such legitimately radical theater companies as the Living Theatre...is to have their techniques and methodologies" absorbed "into the ominous mainstream culture that they were rebelling against in the first place" (121).

⁶⁸ Rubin, *Do It*, 133.

American Revolution.”⁶⁹ Evoking the tactics of guerrilla theater performers like the Mime Troupe, he promised a rebellion against the corrupt rulers of American society, symbolically comparing the Yippie struggle against Chicago authorities to the American colonial revolt against the British Empire. The varied writings of the radical theater groups spoke to the values of one another’s’ work in the late 1960s and influenced their developments.

There remain multiple examples of theatricality that could be included in this analysis: the Open Theatre of Nola Chilton and Joseph Chaikin, Peter Shumann’s Bread and Puppet Theater, and El Teatro Campesino are all models of revolution-based theatrical protest that are deserving of examination. Other groups and movements at the Chicago Convention of 1968 also used theatrical methods in their protests, such as the Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam and the convention delegates themselves. However, the Mime Troupe, the Living Theatre, and *Hair* were the most visually prominent members of the radical theater movement, and for the duration of the convention in Chicago, the Yippies received the most national attention because they applied the lessons of the theaters in street protest.

In conclusion, America in the late 1960s was a domestic theater of war because of protests against the establishment. The theater operated on a visible stage where Americans fought an ambivalent system. On the national stage, the establishment saw an enemy and the protesters found allies through masks, music, nudity, and long hair. The radical theaters of the counterculture movement perceived an attack by the government and mainstream culture, but wanted to bring awareness and change to the American public. The radical theaters and the Yippies intended to give the people back some form of agency and control through revolution.

⁶⁹ Jezer, *American Rebel*, 163.

The San Francisco Mime Troupe performed in parks and streets to instigate a grassroots guerrilla revolution. The Living Theatre performed inside buildings to create a revolution that would leave its doors and enter the real world to create a non-violent change towards anarchism. *Hair* wanted an end to the war and performed to represent the peaceful revolutionaries against the Broadway establishment. The Yippies in Chicago 1968 were disruptive actors that performed in rebellion against the Democratic National Convention. Therefore, the revolution of *Paradise Now* summarizes the theatricality of the era: "the streets belong to the people" because "the theater is in the streets." ⁷⁰

⁷⁰ Malina, et al. *Paradise Now*, 23, 140.